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ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT SOVIET INTENTIONS IN THE BERLIN CRISIS:
AUGUST 28 - SEPTEMBER 4

REACTIONS TO US MOVES

The USSR took several significant steps during the week in response to US and Western preparedness measures.

Troop Build-up. On August 30, Moscow predictably announced a build-up of Soviet troops, declaring that in accordance with a party and government decision an unspecified number of Soviet troops scheduled to be discharged in 1961 would be held in service "until a peace treaty with Germany is concluded." The announcement also asserted that measures had been taken "to raise the combat readiness of the armed forces" and indicated that the Soviet Government would "respond" affirmatively to "proposals" by defense workers to work an additional hour each day.

While the announcement did not refer specifically to the US August 25 call-up of reserves, the Soviet decision was clearly a response to the US move. Moscow justified the troop build-up because of the "military preparations" of the US and its allies and referred pointedly to the President's July 25 speech which "presented us with something of an ultimatum" and outlined "extensive military preparations ... now being rushed through." The announcement also stressed several significant themes of Khrushchev's August 7 speech -- that the West is attempting to convert the Berlin issue into a show of strength, that there is a danger of war, and that the USSR, determined to sign a peace treaty, "will not tremble in the face of threats." These themes were clearly designed to enhance the image of Soviet determination.

Test Resumption. Khrushchev had forecast a response along the foregoing lines in his August 7 speech. On August 31, however, Moscow went beyond this tit-for-tat approach and took the far more significant step of announcing the resumption of nuclear weapons testing. This announcement, betraying acute awareness of the adverse political reactions in some quarters, gave a host of rationalizations for resuming testing. But the primary reason given, and this was the exclusive message of follow-up propaganda, was that the West is threatening "to take to arms and to unleash war as a countermeasure" to a separate peace treaty and that the USSR must therefore be "completely prepared"

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to repel "any aggressor if he tried to launch an attack." The statement asserted that nuclear weapons were needed because "any armed conflict" involving nuclear powers, "even insignificant at first," would immediately escalate into general, nuclear-rocket war. This line, stressed by Khrushchev in recent months, is evidently based on a good estimate of US contingency plans and is aimed at convincing the West that concessions are required since virtually the only alternative would be nuclear war.

These statements indicate the link between the Soviet resumption of testing and Western preparatory moves. The apparent timing of the decision on resumption also supports this conclusion. It is possible that a Soviet decision to resume testing at some future date was made as early as March. However, available evidence indicates that Soviet actions at the Geneva talks during March reflected a decision, based on a variety of motives, no longer to seek a test ban agreement, and that the decision to resume testing at this particular time apparently was taken in late July or early August.

It is evident that the USSR has sound military-technical grounds for renewed weapons testing -- the achievement of a lower weight-to-yield ratio of warheads, the development of an anti-missile missile, and the demonstrative explosion of a "super-bomb" (for intimidation purposes at present, and perhaps for the requirements posed by hardened US missile sites in the future). However, it appears that the primary reason for deciding to test at this time is to serve Soviet political aims regarding Berlin and that these aims are of a higher priority to the Soviets at present than their other political aims, such as cultivating goodwill among neutrals. Otherwise, Moscow would have chosen to refrain from nuclear testing until the US resumed underground tests (which the Soviets had good reason to believe was not far in the offing), thus throwing the political onus on the US and achieving the desired military-technical results without any impairment of Soviet security.

In resuming testing Khrushchev probably hopes to strengthen his bargaining position on the Berlin issue by (1) demonstrating Soviet military power through some striking new military technical development, including a "super-bomb"; (2) convincing the West of Soviet determination to conclude a separate treaty, if need be, through this dramatic reversal of Soviet tactics in the disarmament field and this evidence of the USSR's intent to improve its capabilities for "massive retaliation"; and (3) generating pressures from neutral powers to avoid nuclear war through a Berlin compromise, pressures which the Soviets evidently believe will be in the direction of a solution favoring the USSR.

Access. In apparently identical notes to the US, UK and France on September 2, Moscow responded to their notes reaffirming the right of unrestricted Western air access to Berlin. The Soviet reply reiterated Moscow's view that the Western powers were abusing the air corridors by introducing

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"revanchist" West German elements into Berlin, warned that the Western powers bear "full responsibility" for continuation of "provocative" use of the air corridors, but failed to point to any specific consequences if the warning went unheeded.

The GDR on September 2 "sent" a note to the US protesting the "misuse" of "communication routes of the GDR" in reinforcing the US garrison in Berlin. The note implied, but did not explicitly threaten, that, if the US continued such "misuse," the GDR would reconsider its previous position on maintaining existing Allied access modalities until conclusion of a peace treaty.

Maneuvers. The Soviet September 1 announcement of naval, air, and missile maneuvers with "modern weapons" to be held in the Barents and Kara Seas region September 10 to November 15, together with a warning to shipping to stay clear of the area, is similar to announcements made in 1957 and 1958 on the occasion of nuclear tests conducted from the Novaya Zemlya base.

Other Reactions. There was little propaganda follow-up to the August 28 TASS statement on foreign submarines. A TASS news item picked up a London Daily Worker article alleging that the "Patrick Henry," based at Holy Loch, violated Soviet territorial waters.

Accompanied by some propaganda comment, a Soviet note was delivered to Greece August 30 protesting the latter's participation in the NATO exercise, "Checkmate II." The note warned that the USSR and other bloc states "will be forced to take appropriate countermeasures dictated by conditions," but did not specify what these countermeasures would be.

Moscow Radio reported briefly President Kennedy's announcement of the September 14 Foreign Ministers' meeting. The radio broadcast complained that the President failed to indicate what questions the US would discuss "in talks with the Soviet Union" and concluded "at present there can only be talks on the conclusion of a peace treaty with Germany and normalization of the situation in West Berlin on this basis."

OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

Soviet Negotiating Position. The Soviets publicly indicated some willingness to relax their maximum terms for a conference on Berlin and Germany, but did not go beyond what they had said before. In his statement given Drew Pearson, Khrushchev indicated a desire for four-power talks but did not explicitly propose them. Soviet statements continued to insist that the talks should deal with the peace treaty and "free city" proposals. However, the August 30 statement repeated the rather neutral agenda formula, first cited by Khrushchev on July 8, for a discussion of "the question of a peaceful settlement with Germany" (TASS English translation). The year-end deadline continued

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to be omitted from most Soviet statements, although the August 30 statement was an exception to this rule..

According to press reports, Khrushchev told two British MP's during a talk September 1 that the USSR would agree to transferring UN Headquarters or some UN agencies to West Berlin as a "guarantee" of its "free city" status; this Soviet position is not unexpected. On the other hand, Khrushchev has twice within the past two weeks specifically rejected an arrangement whereby a separate treaty would be signed but existing arrangements for Allied access would remain intact.

Press reports from Belgrade indicate a growing feeling at the un-aligned nations conference in favor of proposing a summit meeting between Khrushchev and the President on the Berlin question. The modality of such a proposal is not yet clear; some reports indicate delegations of neutralist leaders might be sent to Washington and to Moscow while other versions suggest a meeting in New York at the UNGA.

Berlin. The East German authorities continued to consolidate the sector border closing and tighten up internal security within the GDR.

There was relatively little bloc comment on the refugee "Tag der Heimat" meeting held in Berlin September 3 but it seems likely that the Soviet notes of September 2 on air access were timed for maximum impact in connection with this event. Soviet Ambassador Smirnov hinted during a reception in Bonn that the bloc might call for the cessation of West German civilian use of present air access facilities prior to the conclusion of a peace treaty.

PROBABLE IMPACT OF US MOVES ON SOVIET INTENTIONS

Events of the past week have not altered the general conclusions we presented in the first report of this series on the probable impact to date of US and Western moves on Soviet intentions regarding Berlin. We are inclined, however, to attach even greater weight to the possibility of growing rigidity in the

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